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PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTES FAIL TO COOPERATE
WITH REFORESTATION PROGRAM

V. Kol'tsov

The peoples of the USSR have warmly received the plan of the Council of Ministers USSR for the utilization of arid regions by a comprehensive irrigation and reseedling program. At present, there are six expeditions in the field studying soil samples with the intention of determining the best methods for irrigating the soil and making it productive. Kolkhozes and sovkhoses have already planted some 198,900 hectares in trees. In this project the Ukrainian SSR, and the Tambov, Stalingrad and Kursk oblasti have greatly exceeded their plans. Plans for 1949 call for the construction of 2,812 wells and reseedings.

This grandiose scheme for the "fertilization" of the arid regions in the USSR will greatly alter the hygienic aspects of the country. However, it appears that the members of the various sanitation and hygiene institutions have not attached sufficient importance to the possible results of this program.

The Institute of General and Community Hygiene, Academy of Medical Science USSR, has suggested that its inactivity is due to the fact that the proposed type of study is still unknown, and that it does not wish to do anything until the program is completed and concrete data available. However, in the Kameny Steppe (Voronezh Oblast), the Sal'skiy Steppe (Rostov Oblast), and the Novo-Ammenskiy Steppe (Stalingrad Oblast), there has been in existence a program of soil utilization which was started several years ago. There is no reason why the Institute cannot send an expedition to those regions to study the climatic and other changes which have resulted from this reforestation program. Apparently this proposal was put before Professor Sysin, director of the Institute, and he is said to have questioned the necessity of travelling so far to make these studies and suggested that it would be just as well to study the climate of the forest belts in Zvenigorod. This was rather a strange answer from one whose responsibility it is to maintain the health of the Soviet peoples.

The Institute has a sector which is charged with the maintenance of populated places. A similar question was put to Bragin, the chief of this sector.

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His answer was no less astounding. He informed the author that this matter had not been considered as yet, and that it would not be practical to send an expedition to the Sal'skiy Steppe until some time this summer.

Some 4 months have gone by since the publication of the Decree by the Council of Ministers. The various hygiene and sanitation institutes have done little if any work toward completion of their part of the program. One of the few enlightened organizations in the sector headed by Professor Bragin, who submitted a report indicating the theory of the duties of the hygienist and sanitation expert. When asked, however, when his proposed plans were to be put into operation, Bragin replied that this reforestation program is to take some 15 years, but that it would take much longer before anything concrete could be done in the sanitation and hygiene fields. He attributed this to the fact that data would have to be collected over a relatively long period, and after the collection, it would have to be classified and evaluated. Bragin decried the fact that there has been very little study on climatic effects and that the so-called hygienic climatic belts have not yet been determined.

The Central Scientific Sanitation Institute imeni Kriksman is not attempting to hide its shortcomings, as are many of the other institutes. They admit that hygienists have, as yet, not been able to find their right niche in this general over-all plan. In 1949, the Institute intends to operate on the basis of facts presented in a report entitled "Sanitation-Hygienic Characteristics of a Kolkhov Community in the Timber-Steppe Belt." It is still uncertain just how the various problems are to be tackled, and no effort has been made to dispatch expeditions to these regions where people have settled to take advantage of the reforestation campaign.

The Institutes have been involved in innumerable conferences and meetings. Very little has materialized. The Academy of Sciences has appointed a special commission with Professor Sysin as chief to coordinate the activity of medical science in the regions where the reforestation plan is being put into operation. But this commission has done nothing constructive.

Many thousands of laborers will be involved in this grandiose scheme. But none of the sanitation or hygiene institutes has done anything to suggest methods for maintaining the health of these workers.

The 15-year plan for the reforestation of the USSR is going ahead. Many wells and reservoirs have been built. Yet nothing has been done to safeguard the quality of the waters in these wells and reservoirs. Nothing has been done to prevent the possibility of a serious malaria outbreak. Even the Central Institute of Malaria and Medical Parasitology does not seem to know of the measures which have to be taken to prevent such an outbreak.

In January of this year, the All-Union State Sanitation Inspection submitted a series of regulations governing the selection of sites for reservoirs and wells, and methods for safeguarding these water resources. However, the standards which the above organization submitted were those which were considered outdated in September 1940. It is, therefore, necessary that new directives and regulations be issued and yet neither the Central Institute of Malaria, nor the Institute of General and Communal Hygiene, Academy of Medical Science USSR, have done anything to publish new regulations.

The various public health organizations are waiting for directives from the scientific institutes of hygiene which would aid them in the maintenance of workers and inhabitants health. Such regulations are particularly necessary in the planning of new settlements. All facts seem to point to only one conclusion -- that the scientific institutes of hygiene are not cooperating in the struggle for satisfactory completion of the 15-year reforestation project.

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